

Small Black Box Review – October

Variety being the spice of life, Small Black Box presented yet another varied mix of sound and image on 26 October. The three acts certainly catered for a wide range of tastes, musical and otherwise.

Luke Jaaniste's two part work was an intriguing example of low tech conceptual art meets installation meets performance art. Part One was based around a simple idea – three video cameras and three TV monitors playing images of a TV monitor being videoed, a type of mirrors within mirrors idea that was strangely mesmerising. The images represented a kind of visual feed back and were accompanied by the resulting audio feedback. The subtle and constant shifting in sound and image presented the audience with a challenge – to sit and contemplate the slowly transforming work, without any expectation of dramatic change or excitement or the loud and frenetic sound worlds that Small Black Box audiences have come to be familiar with. I for one (and there were others) quite enjoyed this chance to contemplate the space and the sounds and images within it. Not everyone's cup of tea but an interesting concept none the less, albeit one that was perhaps not presented in its most ideal or fully realised form. Part Two was the 'dirty' and interactive version, featuring Jaaniste draping himself over TV monitors and improvising with his instruments, the space between the monitors and cameras. This was more of a performance / demonstration which shed some light on what the audience had experienced in part one.

Clocked Out Duo presented an engaging set performing with live/amplified percussion and found sound objects. Bowls of water, toys, whistles – you name it, they blew it, poured it, shook it or hit it. The Duo, as well as being wacky and innovative with their choices of sound material, are consummate musicians with a real ear for musical texture and pacing. Like all good improvisers, they knew when less was more and when more was called for. Water was a strong theme, with some truly beautiful sounds produced by bowls filled with water, being gently hit and decanted. The delicacy of these textures was contrasted with more raucous and energetic percussion performance, occasionally losing focus but quickly regaining the musical plot. Clocked Out Duo came up with the goods and the audience response reflected this.

Archimedia, due to 'technical difficulties' did not come up with the goods that they intended to come up with, but as in any performance involving live processing of sound and image, this is an occupational hazard. Archimedia presented "Lost Cities Redux: Homage to Baghdad", a work which set out to critique the "excesses of contemporary globalized culture". Visual images of the military presence and activity in Baghdad were combined with video clips from Hollywood's take on 'Lost Cities', accompanied by a soundscape made up of various related sounds bites and what I assumed to be improvised sonic textures, generated by live sampling and processing of sounds. Technology, warts and all, was very apparent here but the work failed to convince. Rather than constructing a coherent work, Archimedia presented us with a collage of sounds and images, some related, some not, and with little sense of form or logic or insight into the issues they claimed to be critiquing. One can perhaps give them the benefit of the doubt, as what we saw and heard may not have been quite what Archimedia intended us to see and hear, but as with any improvised performance, the real skill is to make it work within the constraints of a particular time and space and set of circumstances.